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CABINET**INDIAN COMMUNITIES IN THE COLONIES**

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

Population Growth

Indian interest in British Colonies dates from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when large numbers of immigrants from the sub-continent of India entered Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, British Guiana and Malaya as indentured labour and East Africa as small traders and railway labourers. In the last quarter of a century immigration has become less important than prodigious natural increase as a factor in population growth. Immigration is also now controlled by legislation. In some territories Indians are the largest single element in the population, and often dominate the economic field. For instance, the Indian population of East Africa, where on the average each Indian woman has 6 children, has risen from about 5,000 in 1901 to 259,000 in mid-1954, a development unknown in most parts of the world, and on present trends it will double itself in the two decades between 1948 and 1968. In Fiji, the Indians who were a small minority in 1901, now outnumber the native Fijians. In Mauritius, the Indian population now has an absolute majority over the rest of the population and in British Guiana they are the largest racial group and nearly half the total population. Considerable Indian communities are to be found in Aden and Singapore. Smaller Indian communities, mainly of the merchant class, also exist in other colonial territories, e.g., Gibraltar, Jamaica, Hong Kong, West and Central Africa. In nearly all territories the proportion of Indians who would now regard Pakistan as their mother country is small and they are the less vigorous element in the Indian population. (Illustrative statistics on the facts given above are to be found in the tables annexed to this paper.)

2. There has been in the past and there still is a place in the economic life of the African territories at any rate which the Asian has filled because there has been no other race capable already to fill it. Thus in East Africa the Asians constitute a number of essential cogs in the economic machine as clerks, technicians and petty shopkeepers and until Africans have been trained, their presence is indispensable. Moreover, as shown by recent constitutional developments in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, it is accepted policy to treat Asian residents both in Africa and in other territories as citizens in the fullest sense of the word, since this is the only hope of attracting their wholehearted loyalty to the territory in which they live. Any other attitude would be unfair to people who have entered in good faith and of whom many have made a very substantial contribution to the economic development of the territories concerned. Colonial Governments in East Africa and elsewhere recognise that the rate of reproduction of the existing Asian population, coupled with the inevitable advance towards some form or other of representative government, must confer on the Asian population a steadily increasing importance in the politics of their territories. Any attempt to deny them political rights and opportunities similar to those given to other races will result in the very situation which we want to avoid, i.e., that they will look to India for their protection.

3. However, their occupations, their religion, and for a long time the professedly temporary nature of their residence have all reinforced their tendency to resist assimilation. The experience of territories outside Africa where Indians have achieved both numerical superiority and substantial political rights indicates some of the difficulties which this is causing—difficulties which may be in store for the plural societies of East and Central Africa. In Mauritius the introduction of the 1947 constitution, with an extended franchise, has permitted Indo-Mauritians to exploit their great numerical superiority; and in the past 6 years they have, in conjunction with some of the coloured elements, achieved a coherent and predominant position as a political party. The danger in Mauritius is less the threat of direct Indian intervention in the affairs of the Colony than racial and social discord derived from the fear of Indian domination in the minds of the Franco-Mauritian population which, for a century and a half, controlled the political, and still controls the economic, fortunes of the Colony.

4. In Fiji the rapid increase in the Indian population has caused an under-current of anxiety about the future in each of the main racial groups. The Fijians (and also the Europeans) resent the occupation of some of the most fertile and easiest worked land by the Indians, the prominent part played by Indians in public affairs and in commerce and the general influence which they appear to wield. The Indians fear that they will not have enough land for their growing numbers and are uncertain whether they will be able to continue to occupy the land which they at present lease from the Fijians. They also desire a greater share in the direction of public affairs commensurate with their numbers and capacity.

5. In British Guiana the East Indian element in the population has now shaken off its earlier lethargy, its increased self-assertiveness being particularly marked since India received her independence in 1947. Indians are tending to play a major part in the commercial and economic life of the Colony and the Civil Service, and to displace Portuguese, Syrians, Creoles and Africans from these occupations. The People's Progressive Party, which was responsible for the constitutional crisis in 1953, was not a racial party in that it contained both leaders and members of Indian and of African descent. (Its main racial bias was anti-white.) Its internal stresses were and are partly, but by no means wholly, on racial lines. In the Colony as a whole, however, racial tension has tended to increase and is likely to become a serious political problem. In evidence given before the recent Constitutional Commission, Guianese of African origin stated their impression that many Indians looked forward to the day when British Guiana would be part not of the British Commonwealth but of an East Indian Empire.

6. In Trinidad, the Indians, who for the most part arrived as coolies, now hold a much higher proportion of the wealth in land and property than other racial groups. They are already 35 per cent. of the total population, and as they grow in numbers and influence, they are organising themselves politically on racial lines through the Hindu Mahasabha. A strong East Indian political party is likely to emerge in the near future, both as the Colony approaches self-government and also in opposition to Caribbean Federation, which East Indians dislike because it would swamp them in a unit with an overwhelmingly African population. It is even possible that a racial East Indian party may hold the predominance of power in the Legislature after the next election. The development of politics on such lines can, of course, only result in an increase of racial tension in the Colony.

Policy towards Indian Immigration into Colonial Territories

7. The realisation of such dangers and the natural increase of population in the East and Central African territories has led the East and Central African Governments to the decision that Indian immigration should be severely curtailed, both in order that the political problems of plural societies shall not be aggravated and to permit the African to take his proper place in the economic life of his territory. This general policy is, therefore, to limit further Asian immigration to the minimum subject to:—

- (a) the need to avoid clear-cut discrimination embodied in legislation, which would give the Indian Government reason for airing the matter internationally, particularly with regard to the Trust Territory of Tanganyika;
- (b) the need to preserve the supply of skilled and semi-skilled artisans for which India remains the principal source.

8. The effectiveness of immigration policy in East Africa largely depends on immigration machinery; under existing legislation it is difficult for the Executive to apply recognised policy with vigour and discretion. The desirability of amending East African legislation in order to provide for the necessary machinery to control further Asian immigration is recognised, and ways of doing it are now being worked out by the East African Governments and the Colonial Office.

9. Indian immigration into Fiji, Mauritius and the West Indian territories has virtually stopped and is no longer a significant factor.

Policy of the Government of India on Colonial Affairs

10. This policy may be summarised as follows:—

- (a) to foster links between Indian communities in colonial territories and India itself (while paying lip-service in public to the principle that Indians should integrate themselves into the territories in which they live);
- (b) to build up the position of India as a champion of coloured peoples everywhere, and as the leader of those who wish to throw off "imperialist" domination and achieve self-determination and independence. In pursuing this policy, more especially in the United Nations, India stimulates and exploits the international hostility to the Colonial Powers which hampers the United Kingdom in foreign affairs generally.

11. Reports received from a number of Governors show that the two aspects of this policy together constitute the most persistent and most unsettling of the various external influences which stimulate anti-British, anti-government and extreme nationalist feelings in Colonial territories.

(a) Links between India and Indian Communities in the Colonies

12. Since the earliest days of Indian immigration the Government of India has striven to exercise a "protective" interest in the large communities of persons of Indian origin now settled in a number of colonial territories. At the time when India became an independent member of the Commonwealth it was agreed, after consideration by Ministers, that it would not be possible to deny to her the usual Commonwealth privileges of representation of a consular character in colonial territories, provided it was clear that the Indian representatives could not intervene in local political affairs as the protectors of settled Indian communities or otherwise. Indian Commissioners were subsequently appointed for East and Central Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, the West Indies and British Guiana, Aden, and, recently, Hong Kong and West Africa (the Gold Coast and Nigeria). The position of the Indian representative (formerly Indian Agent) in Malaya (established many years ago) has been brought into line with that of Commissioners in other territories.

13. It is clear that the Government of India and its Representatives are still inclined to regard themselves as the protectors of such communities. Mr. Krishna Menon, when Indian High Commissioner in London, made a number of representations to my predecessors on questions affecting Indians in colonial territories, even where these matters were of a political character entirely within the jurisdiction of the local government (e.g., on education policy in Kenya and land and taxation policy in Fiji). More recent representations have been made (towards the end of 1953) in two formal aide-mémoires from the Government of India. The first dealt with immigration into Northern Rhodesia (which increased sharply before Federation) and the effects of Central African federation in this and other fields. Among other things, including criticism of the Federation scheme itself, this aide-mémoire alleged discrimination in immigration restrictions on Indians. The second dealt with events in East Africa, British Guiana and our general colonial policy. Such representations have in the past been treated with the tolerance befitting relations between members of the "Commonwealth family."

14. Until recently the only area in which the Indian Commissioner had given serious cause for complaint was East Africa, but the Indian Commissioners in Trinidad and Mauritius both appear to have contravened their instructions. Although no formal evidence is yet available against the former, the Governor has reported that there is no doubt that he has participated energetically in local politics and organised East Indian opposition to Caribbean Federation while the latter has

circulated material critical of the South African Government. In East and Central Africa, the transgressions of Mr. Pant, the Indian Commissioner there, and his Deputy, Mr. Rahman, were frequent and often blatant. Reports of these activities revealed a correct attitude in public but in private a consistent meddling of varying degree of importance in the political affairs of East and Central Africa and association with persons of positive and potentially subversive tendencies. Mr. Pant and his Deputy were reported as advising Africans against Central African Federation, actively supporting the Kenya African Union, having contact with Mau Mau leaders, financing African politicians, organising an African political newspaper, and attempting to organise new political parties. These activities became so dangerous that representations were made to the Government of India, which resulted first in the recall of Rahman in the middle of 1953, and then the recall of Pant early in 1954. The new Commissioner is a great improvement.

(b) Indian Attitude at the United Nations

15. Although there has been some abatement very recently, Indian representatives at the United Nations have been foremost in criticising the "evils of colonialism" and the "right" of dependent peoples to self-determination and independence, and they have fostered the idea that non-self-governing territories and those territories alone are characterised by denial of human rights, economic exploitation and race discrimination. They have also played a large part in attempts to establish the accountability of colonial powers to the United Nations for the administration of their non-self-governing territories, particularly as regards the development of self-government and the exercise of self-determination.

Conclusions and Recommendations

16.—(a) The best way of meeting the Indian problem and of reducing Indian interference in British colonial territories is through success in handling the wider problems of the plural societies of which the Indian communities form a part. The experience of Fiji, Mauritius and the West Indies shows the kind of difficulty which a policy of integration of resident Indian communities will necessarily involve, but there is no alternative policy. If we fail to retain the loyalty of the Indians settled in British colonial territories, we shall only aggravate the risk of interference from India. It should be the continued aim of our political and social policy to strengthen the link between Indian communities and the Government of their territory of residence and to strengthen their loyalty to the Crown.

(b) At the same time we should not aggravate the problem further by permitting any significant increase in the Asian population (other than the inevitable and formidable natural increase) through immigration. Efforts to improve East African legislation should be stepped up, and other Colonial Governments (e.g., in West Africa) should, if necessary, be advised to exercise a similar control to prevent the emergence of an Indian problem there also.

(c) A careful watch should be maintained upon the activities of Indian Commissioners in colonial territories.

(d) Every opportunity should be taken to inform and influence the Government of India and Indian opinion generally on colonial questions.

(e) Suitably firm and public action should be taken in the United Nations and elsewhere to counter particularly tendentious and offensive speeches and actions by Indian representatives.

A. L-B.

*Colonial Office, S.W. 1,
14th January, 1955.*

ANNEX I

INDIAN POPULATION OF COLONIAL TERRITORIES

A.—AFRICAN

East Africa (1954 Estimate) : Central Africa (mid-1953 Estimate)

		Indian	European	African	Arab
Kenya	...	128,000	46,000	5,729,000	30,000
Uganda	...	47,500	7,200	5,365,000	1,900
Tanganyika	...	65,000	22,500	8,084,000	15,000
Zanzibar	...	19,000	300	210,000	45,000
Northern Rhodesia	...	3,500	50,000	1,960,000	...
Nyasaland	...	7,000	5,000	2,420,000	...

B.—NON-AFRICAN TERRITORIES

		Indians	Total Population
Aden Colony	...	16,900 (1953)	112,000
Fiji	...	154,803 (1953)	320,373
Mauritius	...	335,327 (1952)	501,415
British Guiana	...	215,260 (1953)	447,280
Trinidad	...	234,662 (1951)	651,048
Malaya	...	665,503 (1953)	5,705,952
Singapore	...	87,213 (1953)	1,120,777

ANNEX II

PERCENTAGE OF INDIANS IN MAIN RELIGIONS

		Hindus	Moslems
Kenya	...	50	30
Uganda	...	61	33
Tanganyika	...	35	59
Zanzibar	...	27	70
Northern Rhodesia	...	66	33
Nyasaland	...	30	60
Aden	...	23	77
Fiji	...	84	16
Mauritius	...	72	28
British Guiana	...	71	18
Trinidad	...	64	17
Singapore	...	70 (approx.)	20
Malaya	...	85 (approx.)	10

ANNEX III

NATURAL RATE OF INCREASE OF INDIAN POPULATIONS

East Africa

The natural rate of increase for Indians in East Africa is assumed to be approximately 2½ per cent. per annum, although some estimates have put it at 3 per cent. (*i.e.*, the population could be expected to double itself within twenty-four years without further immigration).

Central Africa

The estimated annual increase in the small Asian population of Northern Rhodesia is 500; and in Nyasaland 800 (representing an increase of about 12 per cent. per annum).

Fiji

The annual rate of natural increase is about 3·8 per cent. in the case of Indians, as compared with 2·5 per cent. in the case of Fijians (the present total of 139,373 Indians comparing with the figure of 85,000 in 1936).

Mauritius

The present proportion of the population which is of Indian stock is 66·9 per cent. The figures of the last forty years indicate that the proportion is not increasing very markedly, and it is estimated that in 1958 it will only have reached 69 per cent.

British Guiana

The rate of increase is 3·5 per cent. as compared with 2·2 per cent. for other races. This means that if the rate continues, the East Indian population will double itself in twenty years.

Trinidad

If the present rate of increase continues the East Indian population will overtake the total of other races in approximately forty years from now.

ANNEX IV

ASIAN (PERMANENT) IMMIGRATION INTO EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

		1951	1952	1953
Kenya ...	...	4,208	4,286	3,749
Uganda ...	...	1,486	1,615	2,296
Tanganyika ...	...	2,387	3,127	3,735
Northern Rhodesia ...	...	?	310	658
Nyasaland ...	...	?	382	375